



Department of State

TELEGRAM

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ACTION SS 70

INFO OCT 01, CCO 00, SSO 00, NSCE 00, USIE 00, CIAE 00, /071 W
062507

O 011233Z SEP 69
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8474

~~SECRET~~ BEIRUT 7222

~~INDIC~~

SUBJ: TWA HIJACKING

REF: STATE 147514, BEIRUT 7217

1. WE RELUCTANT USE PANAM LANDING ISSUE AS LEVER WITH SYRIANS INDUCE RELEASE REMAINING ISRAELI PASSENGERS. WE STRONGLY DOUBT LANDING ISSUE OF SUFFICIENT IMPORTANCE TO SYRIANS TO HAVE MUCH INFLUENCE ON THEM. OUR UNDERSTANDING, OVERFLIGHT RIGHTS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT TO PANAM THAN LANDING RIGHTS TO SYRIANS AND WE FEAR IF PANAM INTERVENES OR ITS CONCERN EXPRESSED NO MATTER HOW DISCREETLY ON MATTER AS SENSITIVE AS ISRAELI PASSENGERS, IT MIGHT WELL JEOPARDIZE OVERFLIGHT RIGHTS WITHOUT OBTAINING RELEASE OF PASSENGERS.

2. HAVING SAID THAT, WE ARE HARD PUT TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC EFFECTIVE LEVERS SECURE RELEASE REMAINING TWO ISRAELIS. IN COUNTING OUR ASSETS, AND WE HAVE PRACTICALLY NONE, WE HAVE SOMEWHAT (NOT MUCH) BETTER ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH TO WORK. SYRIANS HAVE OVER PAST FEW WEEKS TAKEN SEVERAL STEPS REMOVE SOME OF MAJOR DISCRIMINATORY MEASURES AGAINST USG AND ITS NATIONALS, IE REMOVAL OF BAN ON US FLAG SHIPPING AND AIR OVERFLIGHTS REOPENING SYRIA TO US, UK TOURISTS ETC. ALTHOUGH THESE MEASURES OBVIOUSLY HAVE LARGE ELEMENT SYRIAN SELF-INTEREST, TIMING OF THEM, ALL IN ONE SHORT PERIOD AFTER TWO YEARS OF THEIR EXISTANCE, APPEAR TO INDICATE A SHIFT IN SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY AWAY FROM ALMOST TOTAL ALIGNMENT WITH SOVIETS AND OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES AND TOWARD A MORE BALANCED FOREIGN POSTURE, THIS SHIFT NO

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DOUBT STILL FACES STRONG SYRIAN INTERNAL OPPOSITION.

3. HOWEVER MUCH WE DEPLORE HIJACKING OF PLANE BY PFLP, SARG'S HANDLING OF HIJACK, WITH EXCEPTION OF ISRAELI PASSENGERS, HAS IN OUR JUDGMENT AND THAT OF DR ROMANO, ITALIAN CHARGE IN DAMASCUS, BEEN ON THE WHOLE CORRECT AND EXPEDITIOUS. CONSIDERING FACT HAVE COMMITTEE-TYPE GOVERNMENT AND INCIDENT OCCURRED ON FRIDAY WHEN GOVERNMENT OFFICES CLOSED. ROMANO ALSO AGREES THAT HIJACKING ALMOST SURELY CAME AS SURPRISE TO SARG AND HAS PRESENTED IT WITH REAL DILEMMA. (ROMANO HAS ALSO TOLD US PFLP HIJACKERS ARE IN SYRIAN CUSTODY AND UNDER INTERROGATION). ISSUE OF ISRAELI PASSENGERS OBVIOUSLY AROUSES DEEPEST SYRIAN POLITICAL EMOTIONS WHICH IN MINDS OF MANY SYRIANS TRANSCEND ANY SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATION OR CONSEQUENCES. HOT-HEADS WHO OPPOSED RELAXATION RESTRICTIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE WOULD BE ARGUING AGAINST RELEASE REMAINING ISRAELIS AT LEAST WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT QUID PRO QUO. IF COOLER SYRIAN HEADS ARE TO PREVAIL, THEY MUST BE ABLE TO WORK IN ATMOSPHERE WHERE THEY NOT OBVIOUSLY RESPONDING TO HEAVY OVERT FOREIGN PRESSURE. SUCH OVERT PRESSURE IN ITSELF COULD BECOME REASON FOR SYRIANS DELAYING RELEASE OF REMAINING PASSENGERS.

4. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE THINK THE BEST TACTIC TO BE EMPLOYED FOR THE RELEASE OF THE REMAINING TWO ISRAELIS SHOULD BE DISCREET BUT FIRM ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE SYRIANS TO ABIDE BY INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS OF CONDUCT LEAVING HEAVY GUNS FOR LATER. OUR REASONING IS THAT THE USE OF HEAVY GUNS PARTICULARLY FROM THE SIDE OF THE ISRAELIS IS LIKELY TO MAKE THE SYRIANS DIG IN THEIR HEELS RATHER THAN BE MORE FLEXIBLE. WE NOW HAVE THE RELEASE OF THE FOUR ISRAELI WOMEN. WE SHOULD PUBLICLY WELCOME THIS DEVELOPMENT AND USE IT AS A PEG ON WHICH TO BASE EXPRESSIONS OF CONFIDENCE THAT SYRIAN AUTHORITIES WILL APPLY SAME INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PRINCIPLES IN THE TIMELY RELEASE OF THE REMAINING ISRAELIS. ALONG WITH THE ITALIANS, THE BEST CHANNEL FOR THIS MIGHT BE THE PAKISTANI AMBASSADOR IN DAMASCUS WHO IS HIGHLY RESPECTED BY SARG LEADERSHIP AND WHOSE COUNTRY OF COURSE HAS A LARGE AIRLINE.

5. FACE IN UNDOUBTEDLY ALREADY INVOLVED IN THIS

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PROBLEM AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND LESSENING OF PUBLIC FUROR OVER HIJACKING OFFERS MOST PROMISING PROSPECT FOR EMERGENCY ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION FOR RELEASE OF THESE UNFORTUNATE PEOPLE.

6. ROMANO CONCURS IN GENERAL OUTLINE OF ABOVE ANALYSIS.

HOUGHTON

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